

General Information

What is the Piping Plover, its life cycle and breeding behavior?

- The Piping Plover is a stout bird with a large rounded head, a short thick neck, and a stubby bill. It is a sand-colored, dull gray/khaki, sparrow-sized shorebird. The adult has yellow-orange legs, a black band across the forehead from eye to eye, and a black ring around the neck during the breeding season. Its bill is orange with a black tip. It ranges from 6.75–7” in length, with a wingspan of 18–18.75” and a mass of 1.5–1.7 oz.
- The Piping Plover arrives in East Hampton beginning in mid to late March and males begin to set up territories to attract females. Early pairs are established by mid-April and the first nests will start near the end of April.
- When pairs are formed the male begins digging out several scrapes (nests) along the high shore near the beach grass line. Scrapes, small depressions dug by kicking the sand, are often in the same area that Least Terns choose to colonize. Females will sit and evaluate the scrapes. The female will choose a good scrape and will decorate the nest with shells and debris to camouflage it.
- Most first time nest attempts each season are four eggs; females lay one egg every other day. Second, third, and sometimes fourth nest attempts may have three or fewer eggs.
- Incubation of the eggs is generally 27 days and both males and females take turns incubating.
- East Hampton uses exclosures, or turkey wire fences with bird netting on top, on many nests to allow the plovers to run in and out but prevent predators from accessing the eggs.
- Once the eggs hatch the chicks are mobile and feeding themselves within a few hours. It then becomes the adults role to protect the chicks by alerting them to any dangers and to protect them from the elements by brooding them.
- Snow fencing is erected just prior to hatching to protect against any accidental deaths by vehicles.

- Once chicks are around 30 days old and can fly approximately 50 yards they are considered fledged. Fledglings and adults begin migrating south in August to the southern east coast, Caribbean, and gulf coast.
- It is important to note that because East Hampton Town is able to keep good records of when eggs are laid and when nests will hatch, snow fencing does not have to go up until just before the nests hatch. Good monitoring allows for the beaches to be open to more uses for longer periods of time.